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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: GODFATHER PROBLEMS IN THE NORTHWEST

REF: ABUJA 481

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter N.S. Pflaumer for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Kebbi State Governor Saidu Usman Nasamu Dakingari and Zamfara State Governor Mahmud Aliyu Shinkafi are locked in a battle with their political "godfathers" for control of their respective states. These standoffs, which are similar to ones which have played out in other states (and to some extent parallels the rivalry at the national level between former President Obasanjo and President Yar'Adua) have proven to be a colossal distraction from the business of governance and a drain on the state treasuries. Poloffs visited both Kebbi and Zamfara in late February to learn more about the specific struggles of Governor Dakingari and Shinkafi. This cable offers a comparison of the political situations faced by these two governors and how this has affected their governance of their states. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Poloffs traveled to Birnin-Kebbi on 23-24 February and met with Kebbi State Special Assistant for Due Process Aminu Usman, Secretary to the State Government Rabi'u Kamba, Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs Muhammad Abubakar Kardi, Chairman of Kebbi Governor Dakingari's re-election campaign organization ("Nasamu Two Terms") Bello Shemu Kwansara and the Waziri of Gwandu. Poloffs visited Zamfara on 26 February and met with Deputy Speaker of the Zamfara State Assembly Murtala Adamu, Secretary General of the Zamfara Coalition of Nongovernment Organizations (NGOs) Kabiru Rabui, and Director of Community Health Incorporated Bashir Hamza.

Looking for a Political Patsy
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¶3. (C) Like many of their peers in the last administration, it seems former Kebbi State Governor Adamu Aliero and former Zamfara State Governor Ahmed Sani Yerima were determined to select pliable successors who would preserve their interests and consult them on key decisions. For Aliero, he believed the best man for the job was career civil servant Saidu Usman Nasamu Dakingari who had very little experience in politics. Aliero helped Dakingari leapfrog over better-known gubernatorial candidates, such as retired General Muhammadu Magoro, to secure the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) nomination in 2007. Once Dakingari was elected, Aliero

stacked Dakingari's cabinet with his trusted loyalists. According to Dakingari's Special Assistant on Due Process Aminu Usman (strictly protect), Aliero and his brother Abba had run Kebbi as a private enterprise for eight years. They wasted the state's money on limos, an airport that does not meet the Federal Airport Authority of Nigeria's standards for certification, and other projects approved largely to line their pockets. Apparently, they did not want things to change, and believed tapping Dakingari for the governorship of Kebbi State would be the most expedient way to hold onto power.

14. (C) The situation was not much different in nearby Zamfara State. Governor Sani Ahmed Yerima, who came into national prominence in 1999 when he expanded shari'a law from civil to criminal law, turned to his loyal deputy Mahmud Aliyu Shinkafi to take over the reins of the state. Yerima, like Aliero, left the state house in 2007 for the Senate, and planned to continue to dictate policy for Zamfara State from Abuja.

Finding a Powerful Rival Instead

15. (C) In both states, the honeymoon period between the former governors and their proteges did not last long. Dakingari and Shinkafi chafed under the grip of the former governors. According to Usman, Dakingari was frustrated that Aliero made key decisions without him. For example, Aliero failed to consult Dakingari before asking the governor's own wife, who happens to be a daughter of the President, to reach out to First Lady Turai Yar'Adua on his behalf for a federal

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ministerial appointment. Usman said Shinkafi similarly was displeased that Yerima continued to act as if he were the real power behind the throne.

16. (C) By late 2008, the governors started to strike back. Dakingari removed Aliero's loyalists in his government as well as the state legislature, including Speaker of the House Umar Isah Mungadi. According to Usman, Dakingari started to get tough with Aliero's brother, Abba, who had been the main beneficiary of the corrupt deals signed in the previous administration. Usman told Poloffs that Dakingari demanded the money that Abba owes the state in back taxes. In addition, he said Dakingari is trying to block Aliero from naming the next Senator for Kebbi Central Senatorial Zone, which is now vacant due to Aliero's appointment to Federal Capital Territory Minister in late 2008.

17. (C) In Zamfara, Shinkafi's break with Yerima has been even more pronounced. In December 2008, Shinkafi, along with all of the 14 Local Government Area Chairmen in Zamfara, decamped to the PDP. According to Zamfara State Assembly Deputy Speaker Murtala Adamu, Shinkafi also has secured the support of 23 of the 24 state assemblymen, although they are unable to officially decamp to the PDP. (Note: According to Adamu, members of the executive branch are able to decamp at will, but legislators are only allowed to switch parties if INEC officially recognizes competing factions in the national political party. End Note).

Godfather Problems Slow Policymaking, Promote Populism

18. (C) The majority of the interlocutors Poloffs met in Kebbi and Zamfara suggested the clashes between the governors and their political patrons have made policymaking more difficult and, in the case of Zamfara, robbed the state of much of its resources. Usman told Poloffs that the Kebbi Governor's new cabinet is filled with less-than-competent officials whose principal function is to shore up the Governor's political base. Usman claimed the Secretary to the State Government is an architect and the Commissioner of Environment is "not very educated." Usman warned Poloffs ahead of a meeting with Commissioner for Local Affairs Muhammad Abubakar Kardi that the Commissioner was worried that he would not be capable of

answering substantive questions related to his portfolio

19. (C) In Zamfara, the situation is more precarious. Deputy Speaker Adamu and NGO representatives Rabui and Hamza told Poloffs that Yerima is spreading money around to unemployed youths and opportunistic politicians to make governing more difficult for Shinkafi. The NGO representatives repeatedly referred to the standoff as a "crisis." Deputy Speaker Adamu said that Yerima's antics are creating a lot of "noise" that was distracting the government. He maintained Yerima's visits to the state have become major public events designed to showcase his continued influence. Shinkafi, in turn, feels compelled to put on a rival demonstration to signal his own strength in the state.

110. (C) What is apparent in both states is the amount of money being poured into campaign posters and parallel party organizations to improve Dakingari's and Shinkafi's reelection prospects in 2011. At every intersection, Poloffs noticed large billboards brimming with campaign slogans and larger than life pictures of the governors. Zamfara's Shinkafi is perhaps in a better position since he decamped from All Nigerian Peoples' Party (ANPP) and can rely on the PDP's deep pockets ahead of the election. Dakingari, on the other hand, has been forced to create his own rival political platform called "Nasamu Two Terms" (NATT) since former Governor Aliero is still an influential member of the PDP. Usman told Poloffs the split in the party is a serious concern, and that Dakingari did not want Poloffs to meet with PDP without a NATT representative present. (Comment: Clearly, Dakingari does not believe he can trust the Kebbi PDP which is still under Aliero's control, and has endorsed the creation of NATT to function as a rival structure that he can bring to another political party if Aliero blocks his renomination. How Dakingari's marriage to Yar'Adua's daughter

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will improve his chances of beating Aliero out within the national level of the PDP remains to be seen. End Comment)

111. (C) In an effort to gain the upper hand against their former patrons, Daikingari and Shinkafi appear to have turned to populist public works projects, focusing on being more responsive to public needs. Kebbi's Secretary to the State Government Alhaji Rabi Kamba told Poloffs that Dakingari is committed to completing 21 kilometers of road in each of the 42 local government areas in the state. The NATT Chairman told Poloffs that supporters are being sent into the countryside to ascertain local needs, conduct outreach, and make the communities feel like stakeholders in government projects. In Zamfara, Poloffs observed more construction underway in the capital than in most cities in the north. Representatives from Zamfara's NGO community said that Shinkafi is more generous towards civil society, and appears to be working on the behalf of the people. Rabui told Poloffs the NGOs now have open access to the budget and information on state expenditures. He relayed that Shinkafi solicits NGO and public opinion on the success and failings of the projects he has undertaken, making adjustments as necessary. The NGO representatives applauded the Governor for recently appointing a Special Assistant to address the problem of almajurai children who beg for alms to support their Islamic education.

Comment

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112. (C) Clashes between governors and their godfathers are unfortunately very common in Nigeria. Press reports suggest similar struggles are being played out in Kaduna, Niger, Bayelsa, and Enugu States. In general, the sitting governor eventually can break free of his godfather's influence, but the struggle is often drawn out, costly, and impedes substantive reforms. In the case of Zamfara, Shinkafi's switch to the PDP puts him in a strong position to seriously reduce Yerima's influence. In Kebbi, Dakingari has more of a hill to climb, but his marriage to the President's daughter

may help him in the end.

¶13. (C) Either way, the net result of the infighting between protege and former patron is that a tremendous amount of time and money is lost in the process. Perhaps the only silver lining is that the embattled governors seem to view direct appeals to the populace (through NATT in Kebbi and electioneering in Zamfara) as an important tool in defeating their erstwhile benefactor. It is not necessarily democracy, but it's at least a nod to the role the public can play in shaping the contest between two political rivals. Reftel on Ambassador's meeting with former Nigerian President Abdulsalami Abubakar also presages the political realignments taking place with prospects for associated election-related violence as the 2011 campaign draws near. End comment.

¶14. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.
SANDERS